BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Chosoku Kochi, 82, retired store order taker, Kahului

> *"Even though it was more expensive, some people would buy from me because they were my friends. Even if they were a rich man and had enough money to shop at the plantation store [without] charging anything, they might buy from us [Onishi Shōkai] because I was their friend. It was sometimes like that."*

Chosoku Kochi, Okinawan, was born February 27, 1898, in Shuri, Okinawa. His grandmother was the sister of the last king of Okinawa. As a child, Kochi grew up in luxury.

When he was fifteen, he left Okinawa for Osaka where he helped his uncle in a store. Two years later, Kochi traveled to Tokyo and helped in an antique shop managed by another uncle.

In 1917, Kochi immigrated to Maui to join his father who had arrived earlier in 1906. His first job was cane field work at Pioneer Sugar Company in Lahaina. After one week, Kochi got a job working at Kikkawa Store in Lahaina for twenty-five dollars a month plus food.

Three years later, friends living in Kahului suggested that he come and work for Onishi Shōkai, a large, Japanese-owned store which served the plantation camps of Paia and Puunene. From 1920 to 1947, Kochi worked there as an order taker.

In 1947, he left Maui for Honolulu, where he started his own store, Princess Market, on Fort Street, After closing the store in 1961, Kochi helped part-time at Kanai Tōfu Factory in Honolulu.

Now retired, Kochi lives in Manoa Valley with his wife, Chiyoko.

Tape No. 7-73-1-80 TR and 7-74-1-80 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Chosoku Kochi (CK)

March 21, 1980

Manoa Valley, Oahu

BY: Michiko Kodama (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Mako Mantzel.]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Chosoku Kochi. Today is March 21, 1980, and we're at his home in Manoa Valley, Oahu.

MK: About when did you first become an order taker at Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Was it twenty-three [years of age] . . . Was it about the time I was twenty-three?

MK: You mean, when you were twenty-three?

CK: How old was I, anyway? Probably I was twenty-four or twenty-five. I was in Lahaina, too. Then I was in Haiku for half a year, I think. That was with the pineapples.

MK: After that, did you join Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Yes.

MK: And how did you become an Onishi Shōkai clerk?

CK: Well, you saw that picture of Onishi Shōkai, didn't you? There were two or three people from Shuri, Okinawa, where I myself come from. That was when I was with Kikkawa [Store] in Lahaina, getting twenty-five dollars [per month]. I was told that I would be getting forty dollars if I came to Kahului. At that time I wanted more money. I liked that place because the salary was better. And there were some people from my area, too, friends. Roy Yonahara's father was there, too. Lots of people from my area [Shuri] were there. Do you understand what I mean by "my area?" Like the Manoa area. Because those people were there, I went there.

MK: Those three people were working for Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Yes, yes, yes. They were order takers. They canvassed the camp, took the orders, and delivered the next day.

MK: Those three people sent for you, and you went to Kahului. How did you ask for the job?

CK: I think those people discussed it with the boss. "There's a boy from our area who just arrived from Japan, so would you hire him?" I think that's what they did. So the boss met me and said, "You're still young. If you want to get into business, go ahead and try it." This person is dead too, the boss. There are no Onishis left now. They all--the family died in Japan in the atomic bomb. They all at the same time died in the war [World War II]. The eldest son was the boss at Kahului at that time--he was from Hiroshima. At that time a letter informing him that all [of his family] had died in Hiroshima due to the bomb came all the way via Europe. At that time letters didn't come straight from Japan. They took two or three months. It came all the way through Europe and arrived. After he got this letter, the boss--what would you say--he just seemed to lose all will to live. What shall I say? There was no meaning to life anymore. He'd lost his father, his wife, both his sons. Everybody had died. He was left all alone. Out of despair, he started drinking sake all the time every day. Finally, he ruined his health. In the old days there was a hospital called Kula [Sanitorium], a TB hospital, where people with bad lungs could go. He entered that place and from that time I was here already, so I didn't go to see him, but I heard that he died.

MK: What was the name of that Onishi?

CK: Homaru, the [eldest] son. And the boss was Zenroku Onishi.

MK: Why had the Onishi family gone to Hiroshima?

CK: He [Zenroku] gave the store to his son and was already retired. He might have been something like seventy years old, that old man. He seemed pretty old to me, since I was young. I didn't know exactly, but he was probably seventy some years old. So his son was the young boss then. So he [Zenroku] took his son's--the young boss'--wife and two boys--they were about this big then. They were his grandsons, his own grandsons. He took his grandsons and son's wife to Japan. The wife and his grandsons were just going to do some sightseeing and return. But since they died they didn't come back.

MK: When were they in Hiroshima? About when did they go?

CK: Well . . . . 1945?

MK: They were traveling during the war?

CK: No, no. Before the war. They went before the war. And then they dropped the atomic bomb. It was before the war when they left, but

since the war broke out, they couldn't come back. Like I said before, the young boss' wife and kids had gone, too.

MK: What kind of job did you have at Onishi Shōkai at first?

CK: Going to take orders. In the old days there was a Mr. Okusako, a Japanese, he's dead too. But anyway, he was quitting then, so I took over his job. I went to cover for him, later. I went to the camp to take orders--rice, shōyu, udon, etc., just about anything. Even cigarettes, there was just about everything. There was sake, too. There were all kinds groceries, and all. I would take the orders today in a book about this length [about eight inches long]. In that book I would take the orders. One day--afternoon--from noon on I would take orders, and at night I would return to my own home. Then, again, the next morning I would go to the store and fill the orders that I'd gotten: sugar, ten pound; flour, ten pound; udon, half-dollar's [$.50] worth. Oh, not half-dollar's [$.50] worth, they were buying [udon] in big boxes at that time. A big box, a wooden box. All those items that were ordered were then noted on a bill. The order was filled [i.e., items packed according to order list], and from noon, deliver. Today, deliver to the camp and this side, when that delivery was done, I would go to another camp. And again at that place, I would take orders, return [to the store] and fill the order the next day and deliver. That was what I did.

MK: How much did you get paid for that job at first?

CK: Eh?

MK: How much was your pay?

CK: Forty dollars [per month].

MK: What kind of shop was it?

CK: A grocery store. And it had everything.

MK: A general store?

CK: General store, yes, a general store. In Maui, we took orders and delivered, not like here. There weren't any supermarkets like Star Market or Times--the customers go to the stores, right? But we had to go to the camps, a distance like from here to Aiea or Kailua. I went by car. It took a half day to go to thirty houses. I'm not sure how many, it could have been thirty-five houses. And the next day I delivered. It wasn't like stores here [Honolulu]. The stores here all deal in cash and customers go out to buy. But there [at the camp] the husbands and wives--two man--worked and couldn't go shopping like, say, from here [Manoa Valley] to Aiea. There weren't any shops around there, although there was a small stand [store] at the camp, dealing [only] in cash, selling cigar-

ettes, soda pop, etc. It didn't sell groceries, rice, or shōyu. People went there to drink soda pop and to buy cigarettes. Because they didn't have such foods at the camp [stores], we had to take things that they ate every day, like the food to make the lunches they took to work.

MK: Onishi Shōkai sold only food?

CK: No, they also had clothes, pants, shoes, hats, just about any kind. The stores had almost everything the workmen needed there.

MK: How was it different from the plantation stores?

CK: The plantations had stores at different camps but these plantation stores deducted whatever you bought from your salary. For instance, if you charged $10 worth of goods, and your salary was $25 then, since you worked twenty-five days at one dollar a day, then you received just $15 for that month. But at my store, we didn't deduct from salaries. We received [payments] when customers had money. Sometimes they didn't have money and said, "No can pay." If no can pay, we can't do anything but wait. There is what we call kompang dollar. It takes eighteen months for the sugar cane to grow. They work for eighteen months at just one dollar a day. But since they are contracting to do, say, one acre, two acre under kompang system at the end of eighteen months they can sometimes get $300 or $400 extra at one time if more than a certain tonnage is harvested. Since Onishi wasn't receiving payments [from kompang workers] every month, Onishi might get $150 at that time.

MK: If a person was doing kompang, could he charge a large amount?

CK: Yes, but it depended on the people. Do you understand what moloa is? You couldn't let just anyone charge.

MK: Yes.

CK: We couldn't let moloa and the gamblers charge. There were gamblers then because there were many single men. When payday came they would gamble right away--they would do that. So for those people you would have to go [for charge payments] on payday right away or else no more [money for payments] the next day. But, we don't allow that type of people to charge.

MK: Mr. Kochi, how did you and the other order takers know which ones were gamblers or moloa?

CK: In the beginning I didn't [know]. Well, I took over Mr. Okusako's position. And he knew the good ones and the gamblers since he had been on the job for a long time. So he told me who I must not sell to. I didn't know at first, but after he told me this, I knew.

MK: If there was somebody new . . . ?

CK: Yes. It was very difficult to tell about new ones. The bad ones, the crooked men, pretended to be good. They asked, "How much is it?" and paid cash at first. We would be fooled by this, thinking, "He must be a good man, he pays immediately." And we would let him charge more and more. And soon he would say, "I don't have any money, wait until next payday." And since he had made us believe he was a good man, we would still let him charge. Eventually the balance ran up to $100, and then he would run away. So an order taker had to have good eyes. But there were a lot of order takers who got cheated.

MK: How many of those did you experience?

CK: How many? Well, there were a few. They came running away from other plantations, where they had cheated, so nobody would sell them anything. For instance, from Kaimuki to here [Manoa], far enough so nobody would know about a newcomer's past. They would pay very well at first, to make us believe that there would be no trouble. And when the balance got to about $100, they would run away again to, say, Kalihi. There were people like that. They were mostly gambling men.

MK: When somebody ran away, could you do anything about it?

CK: No, it was all lose then. Some were caught, though. Plantation stores [prices] were cheap. They could deduct whatever customers owed from their salary. For instance, you might buy ten dollar's worth of goods. And let's say your salary was thirty dollars. You would be paid twenty dollars after that ten dollars was deducted. So the plantation store was sure to get their money, while the Japanese stores weren't. So the Japanese stores [prices] were more expensive. But even if we were more expensive, customers bought from us, since we would wait for payments for six months or a year.

MK: Compared with the plantation store, how much more expensive were the Japanese stores? What percent . . . ?

CK: Prices weren't much different for small items like pencils and writing tablets, but rice, let's say, was $3.50 at a plantation store and $4.50 at a Japanese store, for one bag, 100 pounds. A hundred pounds of rice was three dollars and a half then; the difference was one dollar. But the customers still bought from us, since we waited until payday or the kompang dollar. So the Japanese stores had to have capital in order to run the store. Nowadays you can do it with little money, since you deal in cash, and you can make a profit in a short time. But it was not like that in the old times.

MK: How did Onishi Shōkai get started?

CK: I don't know how they did at first. This old Onishi boss, the one who I was talking about, made money like crazy, although I don't

know about before that. In old times, you had to charge a lot higher prices in order to compensate for losses, I mean, for being cheated so many times. It was not like now, when stores deal in cash. It wasn't that way in the old days.

MK: Who owned the Onishi Shōkai?

CK: The boss of Onishi.

MK: One man?

CK: Yes, at first. But when the boss was leaving, it became stock, how do you say it?

MK: A joint-stock company.

CK: Yes. All the workers bought shares. I bought about $1,000 worth. A thousand dollars then was a lot of money.

MK: How many bought shares?

CK: Almost all the workers.

MK: Only the workers?

CK: Yes, nobody from outside.

MK: At that time, how many workers were there?

CK: Well, there must have been at least ten order takers and others, like girls, who didn't go to the camps, but sold at the shop, since there were some customers who came there. Altogether there were fifteen or sixteen people.

MK: These fifteen or sixteen bought $1,000 of shares each?

CK: No. Some bought three thousand to five thousand.

MK: Who bought, mainly?

CK: I really don't remember for sure. That's right before I came here [Honolulu] so--well--I don't know. Mr. Sueda bought a lot, too, but I don't know exactly how much.

MK: Let's go back to the story about the merchandise at the Onishi Shōkai. Did you have things like vegetables and meat there?

CK: No, no vegetables. Since there wasn't any icebox then, in the old times, not like nowadays, we didn't carry anything perishable. And we didn't sell ice cream since we didn't have a freezer. But there was a small store which sold ice cream. And for vegetables and meat, there was a store which sold those. Nakashima was the name

of the store, and it was next door to us. Our shop was only a grocery store.

MK: Was there anything like furniture being sold?

CK: No, not furniture. Again, furniture was sold at a furniture store. And at that time, plantation workers didn't have enough money to buy anything like furniture, since they were getting a dollar a day. It's only recently that we have pianos and TV's. There weren't any TV's then, not even a radio. There were gramophones, operated by hand, but no electric ones. And there were no [light] switches like this in old-time homes. (Laughs)

MK: Since you had gramophones, were there any records being sold?

CK: Yes, there were records. We've got Hokama Music Store here now. But Hokama Store in Wailuku started selling records at first about fifty years ago.

MK: Didn't Onishi Shōkai sell records?

CK: No, nothing like that. Well, sometimes we sold them, when they were brought to sell by a wholesaler. But very seldom.

MK: Where did Onishi Shōkai buy wholesale?

CK: There were many [wholesalers]. Salesmen used to come from Honolulu, once a month. They took all the orders. Those companies aren't around now.

MK: Do you remember the names of the companies? What kind of companies were they?

CK: Well, clothes stores for clothes. Hiyama, well, I've forgotten. Sumida, this Sumida is a sake shop now. And Iida, which is at the Ala Moana now, for rice bowls, chopsticks--zōri, nice Japanese-made ones, not like the ones nowadays, good ones.

MK: Anybody else?

CK: Well, there were about ten of those who used to come.

MK: Were all the wholesalers dealing in Japanese goods?

CK: Yes. But there is almost nobody left now. The ones who remain are Iida, Sumida--Hiyama is gone, isn't it? There are none left, I mean, the wholesale businesses. They changed, to deal in cash, like the cash-and-carry stores in Kahului. In the old times, order takers used to come by boat to take orders about once a month.

MK: Wasn't there any American company which sold goods to Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Yes. It was called Factor, American Factor. We used to buy from some companies like that. And Americans used to come, too.

MK: Anybody else, besides American Factors.

CK: Well, umm, the plantation stores had lots of foreigners. But we dealt with Japanese, only Japanese people, so we didn't have much of that sort of stuff. Plantation stores had customers who were Filipinos, Koreans, Puerto Ricans, and so on, so they sold [American goods]. But we didn't take orders from them, we dealt strictly with Japanese.

MK: Did American Factors send Japanese workers to take orders?

CK: Yes. The order takers were Japanese, but the store was owned by haoles. And some whites came, too, but I don't know which store they were from. Mr. [Alan Shuichi] Sueda knows more about it, since he took care of purchasing, take over his father's [job] after he grew up. Shuichi, I don't know his English name, but that's his name. Anyway, he took care of that. We didn't know much about purchasing, since we did the selling.

MK: Did Onishi Shōkai buy from the wholesale stores on Maui, too?

CK: There weren't any wholesale stores on Maui. They were mainly in Honolulu. They used to come from there to take orders. On Maui, they had retail stores, but no wholesale stores.

MK: Maui Dry Goods Stores . . .

CK: No, no, they were Portuguese stores. That was a separate, different kind of business. We had nothing to do with them. I knew this Maui Dry Goods, but Onishi didn't buy from them.

MK: How about HC&S [Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company]?

CK: What? "H" what?

MK: Kahului HC&S.

CK: I don't know. After all, I don't know much about purchasing. It wasn't my job. Sueda was doing all that. I mean Shuichi who's in Kahului now. His father used to do that, but after he died, his son Shuichi took over.

MK: Did you use to get any suggestions from the customers about what to get for them, and tell that to Mr. Sueda [Alan Shuichi Sueda's father]?

CK: Yes, sometimes. They suggested that we sell things which plantation stores had. But I don't know what happened after I told Sueda about it, since he was in complete charge of purchasing.

MK: When you think about products, how did they change between about 1920 and the time just before the war [World War II]?

CK: There wasn't much change before the war, they were the same, but after the war . . . . Before the war, long time, all same. What did change was that .... Before the war the children were small, right? Since the wartime they became 20-year-old boys and girls. It changed that way--but I don't know first-hand because I had come here [Honolulu] . . . .

MK: How many order takers were there at Onishi Shōkai--in the beginning?

CK: Well, about ten people. At the store there were also four or five people who worked in sales but didn't go outside [to take orders]. And there were two or three deliverymen. The salesclerks at the stores were women. At that time wages for men and women differed. Nowadays they're the same, right? In the old days if men received one dollar, women got seventy-five cents. So at the store the work is easy--they [women clerks] don't carry very heavy things. We [men workers] hāpai [carry] and deliver the rice--only men can do this. So at the store women needed to do things, there's a deliveryboy there to do it, carry things. But people don't come to the store often because we usually go to take orders.

MK: Of what ethnicity were all the workers?

CK: Yes, they were all Japanese. We didn't employ others.

MK: Why was that?

CK: Eh? Oh, because we dealt with Japanese [customers]. But the plantation [stores] had Filipino customers, Koreans too, Puerto Ricans, too. But we only had Japanese. There were Filipino [customers at Onishi]--we sold to them on cash basis, but not on charge basis. And, anyway, Filipino customers didn't come to our store. There was a Maui Shōkai--that place sold to Filipinos. There was someone called Shimoda, he was with Maui Shōkai. They sold to Filipinos, so they even had Filipino order takers. Onishi, Kobayashi, Nihonjin Shōkai were all Japanese. There were five [Japanese stores]. Maui Shōkai sold to Filipinos but Kobayashi, Onishi, Nihonjin Shōkai, and Ikeda--I think this Ikeda doesn't operate anymore, I think this Ikeda doesn't operate anymore, I think he probably went to Japan--these four sold only to Japanese. Maui Shōkai sold to Filipinos. I'm not too familiar with that store [Maui Shōkai] because I worked elsewhere.

MK: Did you ever want to sell to the Filipinos, Portuguese, or other ethnic groups?

CK: No, no, not at all. Even if I wanted to sell items to them, I didn't have the merchandise they would want. So if I wanted to sell to them, merchandise [appropriate for their taste and use]

would have to be ordered. We didn't do that. It was very different from stores of today. Here anybody goes to the stores, right? On the other hand, it's that way because business is on a cash basis. For example, Star Market, even Times Market .... Anybody can go there and buy. In the old days it wasn't that way, before only the Japanese. For the Filipinos there were Filipino stores. They used to go to those. But what I've said applies only to the Japanese stores. The plantation stores sold to anybody. There were Portuguese, Spanish, Koreans, Filipinos, too, who worked. Those [stores]--plantation stores--had any kind workers. In Puunene there was a Puunene plantation store, in Paia there was a Paia plantation store, and in Wailuku, a Wailuku plantation store. At all the plantations there were plantation stores. But those--those sold to any nationality because their method of selling was different from ours.

MK: Didn't Onishi Shōkai ever hire any Filipino order takers?

CK: Well, at one time we did. But it was stopped, since it didn't work.

MK: What do you mean,"it didn't work?" Can you explain?

CK: Well, they ran away, so there was no money being paid, though they took the goods.

MK: Who ran away?

CK: The customers.

MK: Hmm. (Pause)

CK: In fact, I didn't know the situation very well. Sueda must know, since he was the bookkeeper.

MK: So you did have a Filipino order taker.

CK: Yes, for a short time, I think it was one or two years. He quit soon, since there was more money lost than gained.

MK: Well, on a normal day, what kind of work did you do as an order taker, like when you went to work, and so forth?

CK: I would go there and pack the orders I got the previous afternoon. All the orders are noted in a book so, for example, sugar, ten pound; flour, five pound; udon, one box; shōyu, one bottle. All of this order is filled the day after at eight o'clock in the morning at the store. The order's packed in half day's time--by twelve o'clock. The orders are packed one by one. If I canvassed thirty-some households all of the orders would be different so I'd pack each one accordingly. For example, I would wrap shrimp, one pound, one pound of iriko . . . . There were also such items as Pākē sōmen. In the old days there were all sorts of things that are

quite different from what we kaukau today. Nowadays there aren't kuruma fu, kiri fu--I haven't even seen these nowadays. It's even difficult to describe kuruma fu, it's not available now.

MK: You mean fu? What you put in miso soup?

CK: Yes, yes, yes, in miso soup.

MK: I know. It's shaped like a wheel.

CK: Yes, yes....There were cut up ones and round ones---I would make up packages of fifty-cents worth of those, a quarter [$.25] worth of these. I would pack orders by lunch time and load them onto a small truck. The next day I would come home for lunch, and after lunch deliver the things to the camps. Today I would deliver to this camp. Deliveries are fast because I don't talk, talk--I only leave the items there. In half hour's time I can deliver but to take orders I need four or even five hours. I talk, talk, "This is good, that is bad. Buy this, buy that." I talk, talk. But to deliver all I have to do is throw the goods into the house and go to the next camp and again take orders. At that camp it may take until five o'clock or six o'clock [p.m.]. That's because some who pau hana at four o'clock [p.m.] come late and don't get home until six o'clock [p.m.]. I have to wait for those and take orders. While taking orders I take my time....I talk, talk. I talk story: whose boy passed away where and whose place had been entered by a burglar. I canvassed the camps while carrying on that sort of conversation. That takes up time. Next day if I have half hour or one hour I deliver and again go to the next camp.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Go ahead.

CK: After I left the store, I was on my own. I worked however I pleased, since my boss wasn't there. Sometimes I happened to go into a house where all the housewives whose husbands had gone to work had gotten together, just to talk, having tea with some goodies they had made. They used to invite me in, saying, "Mr. Kochi, why don't you have a rest, too?"

"All right," I would say, joining their eating and conversation, which went something like this: there seemed to have been a fire in Honolulu; what was happening in America; talk about the world and just about anything. Those wives had time on their hands until their husbands came home. And at four o'clock [p.m.] they used to pau and go back to their homes.

MK: Did you ever have to go to a certain number of houses, ten or twenty, for instance, in one day?

CK: No, I didn't have to. But there was a schedule. The customers used to wait for me to come since they wanted things from Onishi, when they were out of udon or miso, for instance. Some customers had already planned what to buy from Onishi, the plantation store, Maui [Shōkai], and the others. I used to go to all my customers' houses. And some people were out, but I couldn't help that. Single men used to cook after they came home from work, and some wives worked as well as their husbands. And since these people used to come home late, I had different schedules for different people.

MK: Did your boss at Onishi tell you to go to thirty houses...

CK: No, he didn't. He didn't tell me how to do my job. I did it my own way. Although there was no such order, among us ten order takers, there was competition. For instance, I might have sold $2000 worth of goods in one month, and others, only $1,500. I had done $500 more than they had. So they would compete with me. So even though the boss didn't say anything, we competed against each other.

MK: How did you know, for instance, that Mr. Nishimoto had done $3,000 worth of business?

CK: We were working at the same store, and the boss used to keep records and tell us so-and-so had sold so much, so-and-so had sold so much.

MK: He announced it in front of everybody?

CK: Yes. The bookkeeper did.

MK: The reason was...

CK: The store had in mind that competition, a race, would keep us working hard. The boss sometimes told an order taker out loud, "You'd better catch up with that guy, he's done $2,000, but you've only done $1,000," something like that. But usually he didn't have to. We took care of ourselves and worked hard. But if the records were very bad, he got very unhappy with those he called, "moloa." For instance, he might have had thirty houses to go to, and finishing twenty houses, he would take a nap. There were some of those. The boss used to get mad at them.

MK: Did your pay get better when you sold more?

CK: No The pay stayed the same. But you gained points with the

boss. He would trust you more.

That's true, but there were other things. For instance, if I had only good customers, my records would be excellent, but if I had bad ones. . . .Also, it depended on the size of the family--single men, a couple, or five people in a family, for instance. Let's say you would go to thirty houses in one day. You might go to thirty single men's houses, which meant thirty customers. Or you might go to families with children, and they would eat more rice. It was something like that. So you really can't tell, because if you went to big families, your order would be big, but if you went only to single men, the order would be small. So the boss couldn't complain about that.

MK: Where did you use to go when you were taking orders? Can you tell me the names of the camps and so forth?

CK: Green Camp in Puunene, which is not around anymore. It has become a cane field, I heard. Camp 8, Camp 3, Camp 13 and Camp 10, these are all in Puunene. And Kaheka Camp in Paia, (wife interrupts) and this was the only one [that CK went to] in Paia.

MK: Why were you going to those camps? How was it decided?

CK: Well, I took over Mr. Okusako's job when he was quitting and going to Japan. And I went wherever he had been going. Whatever was decided was done a long time before I started, so I don't know about that. Anyway, someone who was close to the order taker who was quitting took over his customers.

MK: And other order takers went to the rest of Puunene and Paia?

CK: Some went to Puunene and some went to Wailuku--different salesmen went to different places. I worked in the Wailuku area, taking over Roy's father, Mr. Yonahara's position for about ten years. And for the remaining 17 years, I moved to Puunene and Paia and worked there.

MK: Which camp did Onishi Shōkai go to?

CK: All the places where Japanese were.

MK: How about Kihei?

CK: I went there too. There weren't very many families there then--now there's a lot--but in the old days there were only kiawe trees and only four or five families. I went there occasionally, like two times a month. There was only one house in the kiawe area and there were only four or five houses elsewhere in Kihei. But the orders were big, since they were big families, and

nobody else like Kobayashi or the plantation store came. Only Onishi did. Many companies, like Kobayashi, Maui Shōkai, and the plantation store went to Puunene and Paia.

MK: Was there a plantation store in Kihei?

CK: No, there wasn't then. It had nothing to do with the plantation; their business was charcoal. They made charcoal out of kiawe trees in a huge kiln, as big as this house. The soil there was sand, and it wasn't good for sugar cane. There were some fishermen, since the sea was nearby. They couldn't charge, since they didn't have kompang dollar like the plantations, when they cut the sugar cane every eighteen months. They didn't have anything like that, but they got money only when they sold the charcoal every month. So I had to let them charge according to how honest they were. If they had been plantation people who could get kompang dollar every eighteen months they could pay $300 or $400, I could have let them charge a lot. But they were charcoal makers and farmers, so I couldn't let them charge much.

MK: You used to go to Green Camp, Camp 3, [Camp] 8, [Camp] 10, [Camp] 13 and Kaheka Camp. How many houses were there if you counted them all?

CK: Well, Camp 3 had about thirty--they varied--Kaheka had around fifty. There were different sizes, big camps and small camps, like Camp 13, which had maybe about thirty families. And although there were many families there, only four or five of them were Japanese families. The others were Filipinos, and I didn't take orders from them. I only took orders from Japanese.

MK: How about Camp 8?

CK: Camp 8 was like that, too. There were about 20 families, but only three or four of them were Japanese. We only dealt with Japanese. But Maui Shōkai was different from Onishi. They had different customers, since they took orders from Filipinos, too.

MK: How about Camp 10? How many families did you use to go to?

CK: In Camp 12 and Camp 3, I had lots of customers, twenty-some-odd customers.

MK: How about Camp 10?

CK: There were few customers in Camp 10, too. Maybe ten, I don't remember very well.

MK: And Green Camp?

CK: Green Camp also. I had twelve or thirteen houses to go to.

MK: If you wanted to go to other camps to sell...

CK: No, no. Other order takers already had those places, maybe even somebody else from Onishi. Everybody had his own area to go to, just like bus lines. The Woodlawn line and the Kalihi line are different.

MK: They had their own places to go to?

CK: And the Waikiki line, they all go different places. In the same way, I couldn't go to somebody else's area.

MK: Were there good places and not-so-good places to go to, compared to other order takers' areas?

CK: Of course there were.

MK: When did they decide who should go where?

CK: No, it's not like that. Onishi Shōkai had been serving someone for thirty or forty years, and when his order taker quit, another one took over, like when I quit you go, or when you quit I go. But new camps were different. Going to a new camp to start taking offers was okay. But that was rare. We just kept going to the people we had been taking orders from for a long time. But I had some new ones, like the farmers who was located above Waikapu where Onishi didn't use to go.

MK: How often did you use to go to each household?

CK: Two times a week.

MK: Was there a schedule?

CK: Yes. On Mondays, I went to so-and-so's, and on Tuesday, so-and-so's. On Mondays and Thursdays, I went to the same places. And on Tuesdays and Fridays, I went someplace else, and the same on Wednesdays and Saturdays. I didn't go back to the same place until Thursday, after visiting there on Monday. So on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday I went to three different camps, and I repeated the same places on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. I went twice to three different places each week. Not everybody did this. That was my way. But there was a camp called William which was [also known as] McGerrow Camp in Puunene where there was a sugar mill, you know? That was a big camp. A guy whose name was Masuoka used to go there, but it took him three days to finish taking orders in this camp, which had 200 or 300 houses. So it depended on the size of the camp. Even though we were from the same place, Onishi Shōkai, everybody had different ways. For instance, around here [Woodlawn] and in lower Manoa and East Manoa, there were places which had more houses and fewer houses. So it depends. No order men were alike.

MK: In a camp, how did one know who had been going where and so forth?

CK: Like I said before, we'd had customers for a long time, like if a house had been buying from Kobayashi, we wouldn't have tried to go there. They had been handed down from order taker to order taker. So there were customers who had been buying from Onishi for over ten years, and there were others who'd never bought from us.

MK: Why didn't Onishi's order takers go to customers who'd been buying from Kobayashi?

CK: There were cases like that, when we did. But we had to be careful. For example, a customer who had been buying from Onishi and who had a big debt might try to change to Kobayashi, since Onishi wouldn't sell him much, because of the debt. And when Kobayashi's order taker happened to come by, he'd call out, "Hey, Kobayashi!" and start buying from the Kobayashi store. And he would build up another big debt there.

MK: Couldn't you check up on the previous records of the customers?

CK: Yes. If there was a witness to say, "He's a friend of mine, I trust him and I can guarantee him, so won't you take orders from him?" In that case, I would sell to him. There were some people who had run away from other islands, like Hawaii or Kauai, leaving debts. Nobody knew about them at first, and they would pretend to be honest. And there were a lot of cases where those people turned out later to be cheats. You couldn't always say that an order taker who sold a lot was the best. He had to have good eyes to judge the customers. For instance, somebody moves here from Kalihi and asks me to sell something. But I can't start selling right away. I have to ask for references.

MK: Onishi Shōkai was the only company who had Okinawan order takers like you, Kamazo Higa and a Mr. Chinen.

CK: Well, Nihonjin Shōkai [Japanese Mercantile Company] was another one. But Onishi had a lot more.

MK: Why?

CK: Because it had a lot more Okinawan customers.

MK: Why did it have so many Okinawan customers, in your opinion?

CK: It gets complicated but nowadays Okinawa-ken people, Yamaguchi-ken people all understand standard Japanese. But fifty-five years ago, Okinawan-ken people didn't understand Japanese too well. They couldn't speak much [Japanese] except for saying "good morning,

good-bye, and good afternoon." Nowadays that's not the case. Now second generation--Hawaii-born school graduates--are grown up and are fluent in both Japanese and English. In the old days if a person didn't know English or Japanese, he wouldn't place orders with a Naichi person because he can't understand the language. Because Okinawan order takers can communicate in Okinawan naturally he can get orders from Okinawan customers. But nowadays that's not the case, Okinawans are now good in the Japanese language.

MK: When you think of your customers, what percentage were Okinawans?

CK: Almost all, 90 percent were Okinawans. That's why Onishi hired Okinawans, who could speak the language.

MK: Before you started working, the guy whose position you took over was Okinawan, too?

CK: Yes, like Roy's father, Yonahara, and Kuniyoshi were all Okinawans. Now it's different; anybody can go, but what I'm talking about was about fifty years ago.

MK: Was Nihonjin Shōkai the only other company who had Okinawan order takers besides Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Nihonjin Shōkai had only one. Awaguni was his name; he later went to Japan. Naichi people could be order takers now, since the customers can speak the languages, since they were born in Hawaii.

MK: Was Nihonjin Shōkai the only other company who had Okinawan order takers besides Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Maui Shōkai had one, too. Nako was his name. But he sold to Filipinos, too. And there were Filipino order takers there, too.

MK: Onishi Shōkai had most of the Okinawans' orders in the Maui community?

CK: Yes. Onishi Shōkai dealt with most of the Okinawans.

MK: If you had counted all the Okinawans in Maui, what percent of those Okinawans did Onishi deal with?

CK: Well, I can't say exactly, but probably 80 percent. There was the Haiku plantation, where the people who worked in the pineapple fields were all Okinawans. But we didn't go there, since it was too far away.

MK: According to Mr. Nishimoto, there were a lot of Okinawans in Kaheka.

CK: Yes. There were a lot.

MK: Why?

CK: Friends call friends. They wanted to be together. Like the fish in the sea, an akule goes to where other akules are. There is no explanation for that. And again, like carp live in ditches with all the other carp, and aku don't go there.

(Laughter)

CK: What they ate and what they spoke were the same, so they got together.

MK: What were the differences between different camps? I mean the people.

CK: The food and the style of living were different. Everybody did the same. Even among Naichi people, since they came from different places, for instance, Hiroshima people stuck together and people from Shikoku did the same. They had different lifestyles. It's difficult to explain. But they had their own sense of ethnic pride.

MK: Were there any differences between those people? I mean, were they all working for plantations?

CK: Yes. Everybody worked for the plantation. They were hired as plantation workers.

MK: Among your customers, what percent of those were working for kompang?

CK: Almost all--three-quarters.

MK: Seventy-five percent?

CK: The others were day workers [i.e., daily wage workers]. Yes, those were the other quarter.

MK: When you compare the kompang men and day workers, which were better customers?

CK: Day workers couldn't charge much because they only got monthly salaries, while kompang men had the kompang dollar, like I told you before. Even if they [day workers] were good people, they didn't have much money, so I couldn't let them charge much. But kompang men....It was like gambling, because nobody knew how much kompang dollar they were going to get. It depended on the sugar

cane production, which was weighed in tons. Sometimes it was good; other times, only half as much, due to bad soil and so forth...

MK: Did you check how well the sugar cane was growing in the fields where the kompang men were working?

CK: No, no, I didn't do anything like that. Like I said before, it was like a gamble, nobody could have predicted that. Sometimes good, other times, not so good.

MK: Those kompang men didn't pay for those eighteen months?

CK: No. They would pay a little at a time, four or five dollars every month, although they bought eighteen to twenty dollars worth. But the Japanese stores waited for the kompang dollar, allowing a customer to charge twenty to thirty dollars, even if his salary was ten dollars. Most customers had debts. But that was a good way to make money.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 7-74-1-80; SIDE ONE

MK: Why couldn't the people buy on credit at the plantation store?

CK: Instead, they had cheaper prices, dealing in cash, so they could afford to sell at cheaper prices, not having to wait for eighteen months while the Japanese stores waited that long. Actually, people who had money in hand bought from the plantation stores, but those who didn't bought from us. They had lots of children in school, five or six, so they needed lots of money for school expenses and for new clothes. Both the father and the mother worked, but they still didn't have enough. And if they'd bought something from the plantation store, it would have been deducted from the salary. So they would rather have bought from us Japanese stores, even though they knew our prices were higher. It wasn't like nowadays....

MK: How did you do your work, Mr. Kochi? Did you go to take orders by car?

CK: Yes, by car. It was as far as going to Kailua or Aiea. I couldn't have walked. I used a car all the time. People who were near came to the shop. I went to the places that were too far away for people to come to the shop.

MK: Was it your own car?

CK: No, the store's. Everybody was given a car, and records were kept, for instance, on usage of gasoline. So we couldn't abuse the car.

MK: Did Onishi Shōkai pay the gasoline expenses?

CK: Yes. It was all taken care of. We didn't have to pay, but it was charged to Onishi Shōkai. So we used to go by car instead of walking, especially to distant places like Lahaina. But since records were being kept, we couldn't use the car for our personal business, like going fishing on Sundays. At first, it was all right, but later on they tightened up the policy, keeping records--so-and-so used 100 gallons, 90 gallons, 80 gallons, like that.

MK: When did it become so tight?

CK: Well, at the end, after the war [World War II] broke out. Before then, I used to go to Lahaina often, charging the gasoline expenses to Onishi. Sometimes ten gallons lasted only two days.

MK: What kind of cars did you have at first?

CK: Mostly Ford and Chevrolet. Those were the only kinds we had in the old times.

MK: How long would they last?

CK: It depended on the different cars. Some lasted ten years. It depended on where we went. If they were used to going to towns like Wailuku or Paia, where the roads were good, they lasted a long time. But if they were used to going to camps like Kaheka, where the road was bad, full of rocks, the tires wore out faster; so did the mechanical parts.

MK: Did the order takers load the car with the stuff which the customers had ordered?

CK: Yes, we did that by ourselves.

MK: Did they do the delivery also?

CK: Yes, we did most of it, but old people like Kuniyoshi used to go in a two-seater car, since he did only the order taking. The delivery was done by the delivery man, who went in a big truck.

MK: Is that only because he was old?

CK: Suppose you had ordered rice to be delivered, he couldn't have lifted it. In those days, a lot of things came in 100-pound bags, like rice, flour and bone meal, which was used as fertilizer for vegetables, and millet and bran, which were used to feed the pigs. He could not handle them, not like the young ones, so the delivery man did. I used to lift rice and deliver it, though if I had to do

it now, I would have to ask a delivery man to do it for me. I can't do it now.

(Laughter)

MK: Thank you, Mr. Kochi. Let's end it here. I'll ask some more next time.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 7-75-2-80 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Chosoku Kochi (CK)

May 9, 1980

Manoa Valley, Oahu

BY: Michiko Kodama (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Scott Lehman.]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Chosoku Kochi. Today is May 9, 1980, and we're at his home in Manoa Valley, Oahu.

CK: In Japanese we called that "tsukigawari" [new month], when the month ended and we started a new one. Anything before the twentieth or so--like if it was May--then anything you bought up until the twentieth or so would be paid the next month, [on the first of] June [i.e., payday]. Anything [bought] up until the twentieth or so would be paid [for] with the payday of the following month. So, from the twenty-first on would be considered a new month, and they wouldn't have to pay until [the first of] July [i.e., payday]. Not June, but July. So when the new month started, the customers would buy more because they knew they wouldn't have to pay next month. They actually would have almost two months to pay, so they would buy more.

MK: When you say they would buy more, what sort of things . . .

CK: Well, when I say they would buy more,I just mean that they had already bought for that one month. Like if it's May right now, they might buy up to twenty dollars or so that they would have to pay off in June. And if they had already charged about twenty dollars before the twentieth, then they wouldn't be able to buy anymore and they would hold back. They would just have to do without because they wouldn't be able to pay it all on the following month's payday. So they wouldn't buy anymore. But when the new month started,they would buy, because they wouldn't have to pay the very next month, but could wait until July. They would only buy what they could according to their pay, though. Like if they made twenty dollars a month, then they might buy up to about fifteen dollars worth in a month. And it wasn't just Onishi either. There were other stores that they went to that they would have to pay, too. And if they shopped at the plantation store--like if they worked at Puunene and

bought at the Puunene plantation store [i.e., Camp Five Store]--then the company would just deduct what they owed the store from their pay on payday. Because of that, the plantation store was cheaper. Like the same amount of rice that sold for $5.00 at one of the Japanese stores might sell at the plantation store for $4.75. But it was cheap because the company could deduct what you owed from your pay each month. The Japanese stores would wait if you asked them, right? But the plantation wouldn't wait; they would just subtract it all from your pay.

MK: Did the plantation stores have new month, too?

CK: Yes. They had that too. Theirs was later though.

MK: About when was it?

CK: Theirs was on about the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth of each month. If the Japanese stores had had it at the same time, it would just have meant more business for the plantation store, since they were cheaper. Because the plantation store was a big store--if the Japanese stores didn't start the new month early--well, it was a matter of business diplomacy. You know what I mean? If we had all had it at the same time, then the Japanese stores wouldn't have been able to sell much. The plantation had things cheaper and if they had started the month sooner, then they would take all the business. So the Japanese stores had it first [i.e., earlier].

MK: When did Maui Shōkai have its new month?

CK: The Japanese usually talked it over so everyone would have it at the same time.

MK: So Maui Shōkai, Kobayashi Shōkai, Ikeda, Nihonjin Shōkai [Japanese Mercantile Company], and Onishi Shōkai all had their new month at the same time?

CK: Yes. They would usually all have it at the same time. But not all five stores would go out to Puunene--in Kahului there was Onishi, Kobayashi, Japanese Mercantile Company, Ikeda Shōkai, Maui Shōkai--five stores. Five big stores, but only about two of them came up to the camp this side--Maui Shōkai and Onishi. It wasn't a set thing, though. There were some places that Kobayashi and Maui Shōkai went to, some that Onishi and Kobayashi went to. That was up to us. If the order takers had friends [at a certain place] they would go there. Everybody would go to the places where they had some friends. Like if I had friends in one place, then I would go there to sell. So it wasn't like only certain people could go to sell in some places and nobody else could go there. Since it was business, they couldn't tell us not to come around anymore. So we would go where we had friends. And when our friends bought, the neighbors would come over and buy something too, even if we didn't know them. So those of us who took the orders would do it like that, going around

to all our friends' places. So even though there were five stores, there weren't any camps that all five stores went to. Usually only two or so. And there were some that only Onishi went to--like Camp 12--it was only Onishi and Maui Shōkai who went there. And up above there, there was--what was it called--Punawai, a pond was there, so it was called Punawai in Hawaiian. Water accumulated there and the water was used to water the sugar cane, so with that name the camp was called Punawai Camp. Only Onishi went there. But it wasn't a set thing. It wasn't like there was a law--we could sell wherever we wanted to. We would go anywhere we had friends.

MK: Whereabouts was this Punawai Camp?

CK: It was in Wailuku.

MK: You mentioned that the people would buy more during new month--when the new month started--but would you . . .

CK: New month was a busy time because we would sell too much. But they wouldn't have to pay the next month. They wouldn't have to pay until the month after next. On the other hand, if they bought up to about fifteen dollars, like I was saying, then they wouldn't be able to buy anymore because they had to figure it on the basis of their monthly wage. We usually wouldn't sell more than that anyway, because we knew they would just have to carry it over onto the next month's balance.

MK: During new month, would anyone come to your kōkua because it was so busy?

CK: No. It was the same. When I say it was busy, it wasn't that . . . . I just mean that it was a busy time for me. There wasn't any extra help--"each person, each person . . . . You, you"--because everybody had their own business, people didn't kōkua. Well, sometimes the boss would come when it was busy and kōkua, but the other order takers after they filled their own [order] lists [didn't help others].

MK: How much of a difference was there between the amount people would buy when the new month started, compared with the rest of the time? For example, if they bought about fifteen dollars worth at new month time, would they buy about ten dollars worth at the regular time?

CK: No. They wouldn't buy fifteen dollars worth at one time. In one week I would go two times [to the camp to take orders], so you have to figure it like that. They wouldn't buy fifteen dollars worth at one time. In one month I would go two times a week, so in one month I would go there about eight times, right . . . . So sometimes, only cigarettes were purchased. When I say cigarettes, though, I mean by the carton. In the old days, they were cheap--only a dollar thirty-five [$1.35] a carton. Now I think they cost five dollars or six dollars. You don't smoke cigarettes? No? Cigarettes too were

cheap then. Camels--the brand called Camels--was a dollar thirty-five [$1.35]. Now I think they're about five dollars or six dollars. But wages have gone up too, though. Wages too are good now. Now, two hundred dollars a week and like that. In our day it was only a dollar a day. Not counting Sundays, there were only about twenty-three or twenty-four days wages. Even if you worked straight through and got paid for every day, it would only come to about twenty-five or twenty-six dollars because there was no work on Sundays.

MK: This was back in the days of the plantation . . .

CK: Yes. They still have plantation stores now, though, I think. [Plantation stores on Maui are no longer in operation.]

MK: So how much would the average person buy on a regular day? And how much of a difference was there between that amount and the amount they would buy when tsukigawari started?

CK: It wasn't set, but of course it would be more during tsukigawari. We could sell more because they knew they wouldn't have to pay [for those charges] next month. But I would go about two times a week, and if they thought they had bought too much the time before then they wouldn't buy. So even if we sold more at one time, it all came out about the same for the month. They wouldn't really buy anything extra. The customers had the amount of their pay in mind. So if they knew they would be getting twenty-five dollars on payday, they knew they could only buy up to that amount. They had that in mind. They knew that if they got rice or miso or made some big purchase like that, it would come to ten dollars or so right away. So that other smaller items would have to . . .

MK: What sort of things sold the best when the new month started? Was it mostly things that wouldn't . . .

CK: No. What sold the best--just whatever they didn't have.

MK: Wouldn't people especially buy many things that wouldn't spoil?

CK: No. It varied. Of course, people didn't have iceboxes back then, so you couldn't really keep things--things that would spoil. Now, you have iceboxes, but we couldn't keep things back then. So it was all dry stuff that you could keep at home [even] if you didn't eat it right away. Of course, they would go to the fish market to get fish and such, but you could only buy as much as you were going to eat that day. You couldn't buy enough for the next day because there weren't any iceboxes.

MK: How many dollars worth would the average family buy in one day then?

CK: I can't really say about that, either. Some families had five children, some had four. Some customers were single men, others were married but had no children. So it varied.

MK: Did people ever come to you and ask you to start the new month early?

CK: Yes. That happened sometimes. It had to be done secretly though, because if other stores found out about it they would make a fuss. Because you could sell more by starting the new month early, you had to do it secretly so the other stores wouldn't find out. Only two people would know about it--the customer and the one who was selling. We'd just say, "Okay. I'll make this tsukigawari for you."

MK: Did the higher-ups at Onishi Shōkai know about this too?

CK: Oh, yes. Onishi Shōkai knew about it. Everyone at your own store knew about it. You just couldn't tell any of the other stores or order takers about it. If the other order takers found out about it they'd say you were a crook. Because if you made the new month earlier for people you'd get more business and even if order takers from other stores went the people wouldn't order from the other stores. So if people said, "Oh, Onishi was just here and took our order," then the other store wouldn't get any order and they would know the customer only had so much money. So if people said that Onishi had already been there and taken orders, then Kobayashi and Maui Shōkai would make a fuss by saying that you folks had taken their business by starting the new month early.

MK: Did the plantation store know when you let people start the new month early?

CK: No. It would be very bad if they found out. It was all a secret, very much a secret. Because it was the plantation's camp--if they said you folks were crooked--they could stop us from going to the camp anymore. Because they were a plantation store, it was their prerogative to do that. If the boss heard about it he could tell us that we couldn't come there anymore. He could tell us we couldn't come to take orders anymore. So it was all secret. And because the customers were appreciative when we let them start the [new] month early, we'd keep it quiet, keep it quiet, and nobody would talk. . . . There wasn't a lot of that though. Only maybe when someone had had company one month, or had bought a lot for some reason. It wouldn't happen like that every month. Just sometimes it would be like that . . . . Off and on.

MK: When you say off and on--how many times, or how many people would do that?

CK: Oh, it would happen every month, but it wasn't always the same customers. It would be someone different each time. It would happen every month, but for different reasons. Maybe somebody had lots of company come over, or needed something extra for some reason, or bought over the limit. There were lots of reasons why people would want to go a little over the limit. It varied according to the customer.

MK: Did the new month at the plantation store start at the same time as the new month at Onishi Shōkai?

CK: No, no. It was usually set, but the Japanese would secretly make it earlier.

MK: When did the new month start at Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Usually between the twentieth and twenty-fifth.

MK: And the new month at the plantation store?

CK: The plantation had it on the last day of the month--the thirtieth. Or if it was like this month [May] and had thirty-one days, then it would be on the thirty-first. On the last day of the month, anyway. So if the Japanese stores had it on the twentieth--that's ten days earlier, right? [According to other interviewees, new month at the plantation stores began around the twenty-fifth of each month.] So we could really sell then. Sometime between the twentieth and the twenty-fifth, but it varied. We would talk it over with the customers and if they had already bought lots from us for that month--more than they could cover in the next paycheck--then the customer might ask if we couldn't start the new month [earlier]. But we would only do it for good customers. We wouldn't do it for customers who just let their balance build up all the time. For customers who never paid off their balance we started the new month on the very last day, just like at the plantation store. But we wouldn't want our good customers to get away--we wanted to keep the good customers. It wouldn't be me that would suggest it though. The customer would say, "We bought a lot this month, so can't you make it a new month for us?"

And I would say, "All right," but only if they were good customers. If they were bad customers I would say, "No, no. It's still too early yet." We wouldn't do it for everybody, just the good customers.

MK: When you were out taking orders, did you yourself ever offer to start the new month early for anyone?

CK: Sometimes, to a good customer. Because that way I could sell, eh? All the stores were in competition with each other, so everybody did it on the sly. And so sometimes if I said, "No, it's still too early yet," then some other store would get the business. Because we were all in competition with each other, sometimes we would offer to do it for the good, paying customers. If I said, "No. It's early, too early," then some other store would do it for them early and I wouldn't get any order from them. (Pause) I don't know how it is now, but that's the way it used to be. Now I think there aren't nearly so many stores. No more Onishi. No more Japanese Mercantile Company. No more Ikeda--even Kobayashi. I wonder if Maui Shōkai is the only one left. [Maui Shōkai is no longer in

operation.] This is talk about the old times, I don't know about now. I think no more. Now there's only the plantation store [Plantation stores are no longer in operation.] And of the small stores, only Maui Shōkai is left. All the stores . . .

MK: How did prices at Onishi Shōkai compare with prices at the plantation store?

CK: There was about a 10 percent difference. But for the plantation store it [collection] was a sure thing, because they could just subtract whatever the customer owed from his pay on payday. But what, when the plantation had already docked his pay, then the customer would come to the Japanese store [i.e., Onishi] and say, "This month no more--how about next month?" And the Japanese [store] would have to wait, saying, "It can't be helped, no can help, all right, all right." The kompang would--it takes eighteen months for cane to ripen, right? So the workers would wait eighteen months too, to get what they called kompang dollars. They do kachi kane and would estimate the value or the tonnage of the cane they expected to get, and if they got more than that, then they would get so many hundred dollars extra. Back then it was about $300--or at the very most about $700 or so. But that was if they had what were called kōkua men, Filipinos. The plantation would pay a dollar a day, but you pay them ten cents a day extra yourself. So ten cents a day extra would be two dollars for twenty days, no? That's what the kompang men would pay out [to the kōkua men]. The plantation itself would pay a dollar a day for men and seventy-five cents or so for women. . . . Now they get big monthly salaries though--now some of them as much as two or three hundred dollars.

MK: If the merchandise at the plantation store was 10 percent cheaper, why did people buy from Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Because they could charge and have a balance. At the Japanese stores people didn't have to pay off the balance of their account every month. At the plantation store, if you had worked twenty-five days and made twenty-five dollars, they would just subtract whatever you owed from that amount. But the Japanese stores couldn't do that . . . . And the customers all knew that too. Even though they knew the plantation store was cheaper, they wouldn't have any pocket money if their pay was docked, so they would come to the Japanese stores. They knew it was more expensive, but they could charge. So people who actually had money wouldn't buy from the Japanese stores. It was mostly poor folks who were customers of the Japanese stores--people who would say, "Wait for my payments," would patronize the Japanese stores. Furthermore, the customers were clever, too. Knowing that the Japanese stores would wait [for payments] no matter how long, they would use money for something else and make them [the Japanese stores] wait. Even if they had money they'd say, "Wait for the kompang dollars." And, then they would use their money for something else--to buy clothes or a kimono or something like that. Because they couldn't afford

to buy nice clothes or a dress if the plantation docked their pay. So even if it was more expensive they would buy from Onishi and get Onishi to wait for payment so they could buy a dress--a nice one--or something. Not just dresses really, but there weren't any cars back then or radios. No radios, no cars, no televisions either, so they didn't spend much money. Of course, it was mostly clothes that people used their money for. Clothes for the women or maybe a nice shirt for the men--like that. So even if it [merchandise] was expensive they would buy from the Japanese stores.

MK: Were there any reasons other than those you just mentioned why people would buy from Onishi Shōkai?

CK: Well, just mostly that. Only that it was easier for people to budget money when they shopped at the Japanese stores. They couldn't do that sort of thing at the plantation store, so they would buy from the Japanese stores even though they were more expensive.

MK: Did people buy from Onishi Shōkai or some place like Maui Shōkai, where there were a lot of different delivery people, because of the personality of the people who would come to take their orders?

CK: What?

MK: Would people buy from Onishi Shōkai because you became friends with them and would eat and drink with them?

CK: Yes, that was part of it too. There was that sort of thing. Even though it was more expensive, some people would buy from me because they were my friends. Even if they were a rich man and had enough money to shop at the plantation store [without] charging anything, they might buy from us because I was their friend. It was sometimes like that.

I used to help people's children get married sometimes, when they would grow up and get out of school--when they got to be about twenty or so. It was my own special service, not part of the business. If there was a nice boy over here and a nice girl some place else, I would go to them and say, "How about it?" I married off about twenty-four couples that way. Now you have wedding parties at tea houses, right? But back then we would put up a big tent at the camp and have the party there. I would sell all the things for the party. Ingredients for the food, even the nori for maki sushi--sold about two hundred sheets. They rolled about two hundred sushi. Now if you have a party at a tea house they charge so much per person, but back then . . . . I did that. The young men who had just come over from Japan had to send a request for deferment from military service every year. They would do it for you at the post office in Puunene, but they charged two dollars--just to write the consulate. That I would do it for free. Because of that customers would spread the word and tell others to buy from me. There were things like that too. But that didn't have anything to do with

Onishi, it was my own doing. It wasn't the store's business, it was my own business.

MK: What sort of things would you do to get new customers?

CK: No, no. I would just get customers through my friends. They would introduce them to me. The other services were just my own doing, not Onishi's doing. Even at the store they didn't know about those things. I didn't have to do them, it was just my own idea. Nobody at the store told me to do things like that.

MK: You said during our previous conversation that you would often eat and drink with the customers . . .

CK: Yes, yes. There was that too. If you drink with people you get to be friends. I don't know if I told you this or not, but there used to be a fellow named Tanji who worked for Japanese Mercantile Company. He was from Fukushima prefecture [and] he didn't drink at all. So people would tell their wives, "Oh, don't buy from him, he doesn't drink. Buy from Kochi because he drinks." That's when I first started to drink. Because of that I discovered that drinking with people was one sort of service too. So that's when I started to drink. I was only about twenty-five or twenty-six then and hadn't ever really drunk much. There were older menfolk--what you call kompang--who would get soaking wet because they did hanawai. They would get wet with all the water and it would be around half-past four [4:30 p.m.], pau hana, when they returned from work. There's no sun, and it's cold, eh? So when they got back, they would make their own [liquor]--it was homemade. Even if it was called sake--unlike now there was no sake at the stores. No, there was sake at the stores but it was costly to go there--so it was homemade. With rice we made what we called kōji [malted rice] and then put in sugar and hops. There's this jar--ten-gallon jar--we would make it in that and actually have to leave it for about three weeks for it to become sake. But from the day after it's made, we would start drinking the sweet stuff, before the sugar had even dissolved. We just couldn't wait, you know? There was some amount of alcohol in it. We would make it ourselves by putting in malted rice, sugar, and hops. Homemade.

MK: What sort of things would you do with the customers when you drank with them? Drinking and talking--was there anything else you did with them, as their friend?

CK: No, we would just talk story--small talk. Or if there was a boy over there that I knew about and a girl over here, I would try and get them together. I married off twenty-four boys and twenty-four girls. . . . Not all at one time, mind you, but during a little over thirty years I was over there [Maui] I did that many.

MK: Looking back over the years, in what ways did your job as an order taker for Onishi Shōkai change?

CK: What?

MK: In the beginning, for example, you got customers by drinking with people, but was it the same later on? Would you drink and make small talk with . . .

CK: Yes, yes. Another thing was that all my customers were people from Okinawa. Back then the people from Okinawa hadn't been to school. Now, the second generation--boys, girls--there are grown-up ones, of course, but back then, when I was around, all the children were only seven or eight [years old] or so. Like this fellow Shinsuke Nakamine that you hear about now--you know him? This was when he was just a child. He went back to Japan when he was little and came back here when he got out of high school. Anyway, back then none of them spoke English, no one. And they didn't speak Japanese either. So you had to take their orders in Okinawan. When mainland Japanese went to take their orders, the language was a bit strange so it didn't work out. Now they all speak very well, of course, and the children are out of school and they have children and grandchildren, too. So it's good now, but in the old days there weren't any grandchildren at all. Even the children were only seven or eight [years old] at most--just old enough to walk to school. Of course I wouldn't take the orders from the children, but from the parents. And the parents didn't know much Japanese.

MK: So at first you took the orders in Okinawan?

CK: Yes, in Okinawan. . . . When people from mainland Japan would go, they wouldn't get the order because their language was different. Well, they might get the order, but it was hard. And the people ordering liked it better when they could order in Okinawan.

MK: But did you take orders in Japanese or English after ten or fifteen years?

CK: No, not in English, by the time I came here [Oahu]. . . . I wouldn't take the order from the children, I'd take it from the parents. Even after the children were finished with high school they would live and eat with their parents. They wouldn't move away until they got married. As long as they were with their parents, the parents would do all the ordering.

MK: So you took orders in Okinawan right up until the time you quit [1947]?

CK: Yes, yes. From about the time I quit, the boys were already out of high school and some might come and say, "Give me cigarettes." They would order cigarettes and things like that. But it was their mothers and fathers who would order all the food and cook. Their boys would only order cigarettes or a [writing] tablet or something like that. And that was only just before I came over here [Oahu].

MK: Did everyone know the price of things when you went out to take orders?

CK: Everyone?

MK: Was the price you charged for things known?

CK: By me?

MK: Yes.

CK: Well, I couldn't very well sell anything if I didn't know the price, could I?

MK: Did you have the price written somewhere in Japanese or English?

CK: No. You could remember without having to have them written down. So much for rice, so much for shōyu, so much for miso, so much for flour--the [writing] tablets and such all had the price on them, so for those things you didn't have to remember the price. You could just look when you sold it. I didn't remember the prices on everything. Like if somebody wanted a certain tablet, I would write down "one tablet" on the order sheet and check the price and write it down. I wouldn't tell the customers the price of things--well, if I knew I would tell them, but for the ones I didn't know I would just say, "I'll check how much." And I would check how much it was and tell them it was one dollar or a half dollar or whatever.

MK: Would you write the price down in Japanese or English?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: The bookkeeper wrote out the prices?

CK: Yes. He was named Sueda--the father of Shuichi was the one. And then when he died Shuichi became the bookkeeper [Alan Sueda, another interviewee]. I don't know Shuichi's name in English, but he was Sueda's boy . . . .Anyway, his father was the bookkeeper. In the very beginning, even before Sueda, a man named Miyake did it. He had gone to high school in Japan and came over here to marry Onishi's daughter. He was the first bookkeeper. He couldn't speak any English, only Japanese. So then Sueda--old man Sueda--did it and after he died--this was when we were coming [to Oahu]--his son did it. But his son [Alan] was still a child, still walking to school.

MK: To change the subject a little . . . . Could just anyone charge things?

CK: No, that, no can. On payday the men who liked to gamble would take their pay and gamble. So we wouldn't sell to gamblers. We'd sell to them for cash, but we wouldn't let them charge. We could usually tell because people would talk and say so-and-so's a gambler. So to those kind [of people] we would sell for cash, but not on credit.

MK: What sort of people charged things at the store?

CK: Oh, regular people--anybody who worked kompang could charge because if you worked kompang that meant in one year and a half after you did kachin kane you would get from about $300 to $500 from the plantation. The bigger the area you worked, the more money you would get because you would be able to grow more cane. So it was a sure thing and anyone who did that could charge.

MK: What about people who had recently moved into the camp?

CK: We wouldn't sell to them right away. People like that bought from the plantation store.

MK: You say that you wouldn't sell to them right away, but could they charge things after they had been there so many months?

CK: No, not very easily. It was hard to know about those people. The people who moved into the camp like that usually had run up a large bill some place else and run out on it. (Pause) People would move to a new camp when they had done something bad at one camp--done something bad with a woman or gotten in trouble with the plantation store or something. People who didn't know would sell to them at first, but I'd been at it a long time, so I wouldn't sell to people like that. That's why the new men would get fooled too much when they went out to take orders, because they didn't know about things like that. I might have been fooled in the beginning too, but in the beginning I had gone around with my friend--the papa of the recently talked about Roy Yonahara. He had told me who was a good man and who would be all right to sell to, and who was a gambler and shouldn't be sold to. So I had heard beforehand and could be sure. After that, gradually, I just listened and watched until I knew for myself. Eventually I got so I knew, based on my judgment.

MK: Could people who didn't live at the plantation camp charge things too?

CK: If they were good people. There were people who farmed around the edge of the plantation. They farmed on their own. People like that had their own houses. They would grow vegetables and such--they were farmers. Even though they weren't with the plantation we would sell to them. . . . Because they had land and were working as farmers.

MK: When people charged things, would you write down their name or

their plantation number?

CK: No, at that time we used names. The plantation used the numbers--they would charge by number. The Japanese stores used names, not the numbers. At the plantation store everything was by number.

MK: When would you go out to collect the money from the customers?

CK: On payday--about the beginning of the month, about the third or fourth. But even on payday there wasn't any set order [of collection] that I would follow. If there was a house where the husband sometimes gambled, then I would go there first. And if it was a good man, then you could go there at the very last and they would still have the money for you. But for the kind of man who was liable to head downtown as soon as he got some money, I would go to his house on payday and be waiting for him before he got home. So I would go there first. And the places that were a sure thing--where you knew that you would get paid--you could take your time, take your time, and go much later. So when I went out on collection, I would jump all around--I wouldn't go here, then here, and here; I would go here and there; jump, jump--rather than following a regular route. I would go first to the bad--well, not really bad people, but the people who didn't always pay up on time. Then I would just take my time going to the places where they always paid up without any trouble.

MK: How would you actually make the collections?

CK: Oh, I'd just take them their bill. The bill for the one month.

MK: What would be written on the monthly bill?

CK: There would be the slip that listed the things they had bought on a certain day. Like for May 9 it might say, "Rice, shōyu, udon. . . ." and then the price for each item and the total. It would be like that--one for the ninth, one for the thirteenth, one for the fifteenth. There were bills like this, so each bill had the customer's name on it. Like if it was for Kochi, it would say "Kochi" at the top.

MK: You put their name on it and would you take it to them?

CK: Yes. We would keep all the bills of what they bought at the store. We would stick one of those, uh--we would stick one in like this . . . (demonstrates with notepad)

MK: Carbon paper?

CK: Yes. We'd stick one of those in and write down what they ordered. Then when we delivered the order we would include the slip with their order. The copy underneath would be kept at the store. Then on payday I would take to the customer all of the ones we had kept

at the store. So the original that was written in pencil went out with their order, and the carbon copies that had been kept at the store would be taken to them on payday.

MK: Did most people pay their entire bill at one time?

CK: No. Some would and some wouldn't. Some would ask to carry the balance over to the next month.

MK: Did a majority of the people ask to carry their balance over? Or did most people usually pay the full amount?

CK: The usual thing to do was to pay the whole amount, of course. But it was hard, very hard to get everybody to do that.

MK: What percentage of your customers paid their bill at one time?

CK: Uh--well, let's see. We sold about $1,200 to $1,500 [worth] a month. So out of $1,200, I think maybe about $1,000 would come in. But on the other hand, sometimes we would sell $1,200 worth and $1,200 would come in . . . .It varied. Sometimes someone was sick or would ask us to wait for the money because they wanted to take a trip to Honolulu or something. Some would say, "I'm going to Honolulu on a pleasure trip. I want to pay you but I'm going to Honolulu and come back and I'm planning to use this [money]. So pay, no can." Even with good customers that happened sometimes, so it varied.

MK: What happened to someone who just wouldn't pay their bill?

CK: They would be garnisheed. There was a what-do-you-call-it [collection agency] and we would sell the account to them.

MK: Who would you sell it to?

CK: To the place that garnishees people--there's a place that does it as a business. I forget what you call it (tape garbled). I don't know how they collected, but we would pay them a commission so that if they collected $100, we would get $80.00 and they would get $20.00.

MK: How big a balance could a person run up before he would be garnisheed?

CK: Well, if they didn't pay for four or five years. We wouldn't have anybody garnisheed just because they didn't pay for two or three months. But if they didn't pay for four or five years and even quit buying from us and started buying from some other store . . . . Like if they had a hundred-dollar balance at Onishi for four or five years without paying and then they start buying from Kobayashi or Maui Shōkai or some other store--there were people like that. Those are the ones we would have garnisheed, because they weren't

our customers anymore. You can't garnishee them while they're still your own customers. You just have to wait until they finally pay you. But when they quit buying from Onishi and start buying from some other store, then they're not your customers anymore, so [you can garnishee them] . . .

MK: When you went out for collection would you also sell and take orders?

CK: Yes, I did it all myself. The same person did the selling and the collecting.

MK: Would you make collections and take orders on the same day?

CK: It wasn't set. In one month I would both sell and make collections. Payday at the plantation was always on a set day, it was set, but it was hard to get people to pay you right on payday because people had to pay into tanomoshi and things like that. So some people wouldn't want to pay until they had taken care of that. The people who had money would pay right away. So I would both take orders and collect money--I would take orders every day and I would collect money every day. So even though payday came on a certain day at the plantation, there wasn't any set day when people would pay the store. They would pay tanomoshi or whatever else they had to pay and if they had any left over then they would ask us to wait--to carry their balance over.

MK: How was Onishi Shōkai during the war [World War II]?

CK: It was good during the war. During the war everything was [bought with] cash. I think during the war the wages at the plantation went up. Sugar [prices] went up too, as I recall. And there wasn't any place the customers could go either, because they couldn't leave the camp. They couldn't even gamble, they couldn't do anything. So during the war was a good time for all the stores. Everything came in cash.

MK: So people bought more during the war than they had before the war?

CK: Yes, yes. We sold more things and the money came in better than before. It was good all around.

MK: At the time of the war, didn't many Japanese have their possessions and their businesses confiscated?

CK: Yes, yes.

MK: Why didn't anything like that happen to Onishi Shōkai?

CK: I really don't know. That was the boss and the bookkeeper's affair. Sueda should know about that . . . .I wonder why that was . . . [NOTE: See interview with Alan Sueda.]

MK: Did the soldiers buy anything from Onishi Shōkai?

CK: No, they didn't buy anything. They just went to the beer hall and just drank beer. They got all their kaukau from the army, so they didn't buy things to eat. But they were going to war--going to die--so they said they didn't need any money. The beer hall was always packed. A fellow named Azeka ran a beer hall next to our place then. He made good money then and now he has a big store in Kihei. Azeka's. It's still there, right? Back then he was just a plantation man at the camp, but he bought the beer hall from somebody else right about the time the war started and with that the money came pouring in and made him a rich man.

MK: How was it during the war for Maui Shōkai, Kobayashi Shōkai, and the other Japanese stores?

CK: They were all in business, but I don't know how they did. You'd have to ask the bookkeeper about that. I just took the orders.

MK: Was there any change during the war in the type of merchandise or the price of goods that were sold at Onishi Shōkai? Were there any changes?

CK: I wonder, I wonder if there were [changes]. Prices might have gone up, but I don't remember very well . . . . I think things were run about the same way, but I don't really know. The boss went to Japan then and was killed by the atom bomb--the number one boss. Onishi--he had gone to Japan before the war and when they dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima his whole family was killed. Of course because he was dead he didn't come back here. So then his son became the boss. His name was Homaru, but because his whole family had been killed in Japan, he couldn't take it and would just drink all the time. He would drink Japanese sake from morning on--drink it straight out of a gallon bottle. He would drink and get despondent. Then his liver got bad and he went in the hospital in Kula and died there. (Pause) So now there aren't any Onishis left. He was the oldest son, and the second son died too. The father died in Japan and both the boys died over here, so now they're all pau.

MK: Before the war you used to go around by car from early in the morning until late at night, right? But did you also work until late at night during the war?

CK: No, I couldn't work until late. I'm a citizen now, but back then [World War II] I was an alien. I couldn't even drink liquor! You couldn't walk around late at night. If you weren't at home they would wonder what you were doing. There were MPs [Military Police] with guns everywhere--it was too frightening to stay out late. Even at the camp they had a blackout and the globes on all the lamps had to be blackened with soot. So even at home it was no fun because it was dark and there was maybe only one place where you could sit and talk a little. Nobody could have a party--you couldn't do

anything.

MK: Did the fact that people couldn't have parties or sit around and drink together affect your ability to get orders for the store?

CK: Maybe I couldn't sell as much, but the cash came in. People couldn't gamble or do anything bad, so everybody became a good boy and paid their bills. Before they had let their balance build up at the store so they could play a little, but during the war there wasn't anything to do, so they would pay the store. And I think wages went up a little, too, because the price of sugar had gone up on account of the war. So everybody had money and paid their balance off. We collected on all the unpaid balances we had--over $10,000.

MK: After the war, in 1946, there was a strike organized by the labor union, right? Did Onishi Shōkai make any donations to the workers at that time?

CK: I really have no idea . . . . I came over here [Oahu] in 1947.

MK: This strike was in 1946.

CK: Nineteen forty-six--yes, yes. There was one, but I don't know what the store did. The bookkeeper and manager would have taken care of that. I just took the orders.

MK: Did you give money or anything to any of your friends who were striking?

CK: No, no. Maybe the store gave something, but I didn't know about it . . . . Sueda--Shuichi, Alan--would know about that because he was the bookkeeper then, but I don't know about things like that.

MK: What was it like taking orders during the strike?

CK: I don't remember exactly. Uh--it was the sugar strike, right?

MK: That's right.

CK: Then it was bad, I think. Because nobody was getting paid. I really don't remember very well. Anyway, nobody could charge because they weren't getting paid. Charge, no can. Everything was cash.

MK: If you compare how it was at Onishi Shōkai before the war with how it was after the war, what sort of changes were there?

CK: Oh, well. Before the war the business had been almost all by credit. After the war it was all cash. So it was too much good . . . . Business was good anyway, but the boss was killed in Japan and so his son, the young boss, became what you call, despondent. The

son's wife and two boys had gone back with the old man and they had been killed too, so the son was left alone. So he just drank all the time and died soon after that too.

MK: You said that after the war everything was cash, but why was that?

CK: Well, it just happened that way because everybody had money, so they paid cash. I don't know what it was about the war, but everybody had money. Maybe it was because sugar [prices] went up, I don't really remember if sugar [prices] went up or not. I think it was because sugar went up on the stock market in New York . . . . Anyway, before people had been making a dollar a day and afterwards they were making a hundred-something a month. So people had money and everything became cash. But once everybody had cash they started buying from the plantation stores again because they were cheaper. The Japanese stores were more expensive, but they had stayed in business by letting people charge things. So the Japanese stores started not selling as much. That's why the five big Japanese stores went broke--well, not broke, but it wasn't like it used to be anymore. Once people had money they would just go to the cheapest place to shop and so the plantation stores sold more and more, and the Japanese stores couldn't sell much. That's why I came over here [Oahu] because business was down by about half. Where we used to sell a thousand some dollars worth in one month, we were selling only six or seven hundred. After paying my salary and whatnot, the store could hardly make a profit at that rate. So later I came over here. . . . I'm not sure, but I think sugar prices--New York sugar prices--going up during the war is what did it. After the war started everybody's pay went up because sugar prices were good. They have money so they buy from the cheaper places. So the Japanese stores all went broke because people charged at Japanese stores when they didn't have money but bought from cheaper places when they got more money.

MK: Do you think it was because of the unions . . .

CK: The unions? I don't know--I don't know about that part.

MK: When you say people went to the cheaper stores, which stores were those?

CK: The plantation stores. They were 10 or 20 percent cheaper. The reason the Japanese stores had been able to sell even though they were 10 or 20 per cent more expensive was because they were willing to wait one year and a half for people kachin kane to get their kompang dollars for the cane they had grown. But once people had money they didn't have to [ask a store to] wait. They could just go where it was cheaper and pay cash. Plantation workers who used to make twenty-five or thirty dollars were making over a hundred--almost two hundred dollars. So they didn't need the credit they used to get at the Japanese stores, but could just spend their cash some place where things were cheaper. The Japanese stores sold on

credit so they were able to sell. If it was on cash [basis], it was the plantation store, of course, that did well.

MK: Well, I guess that's about all for today. We've certainly learned a lot. Thank you very much.

CK: No, no.

END OF INTERVIEW

STORES and STOREKEEPERS of Paia & Puunene, Maui

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa

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